

# EVOLVING IDENTITIES

*Contents and processes of identity development  
among people in their late twenties*

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd från Samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligens förvaras fredagen den 12 juni klockan 10.00 2015, sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

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Avhandlingen grundar sig på följande tre artiklar:

- I. Frisén, A., Carlsson, J., & Wängqvist, M. (2014). "Doesn't Everyone Want That? It's Just a Given": Swedish Emerging Adults' Expectations on Future Parenthood and Work/Family Priorities. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 29, 67-88. doi: 10.1177/0743558413502537
- II. Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisén, A. (2015). Identity development in the late twenties: A never ending story. *Developmental Psychology*, 51, 334-345. doi: 10.1037/a0038745
- III. Carlsson, J., Wängqvist, M., & Frisén, A. *A comparison between two models of identity development: Same terminology but different processes.* (Manuscript)



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## ABSTRACT

Carlsson, Johanna (2015). *Evolving identities: Contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

The overall aim of this thesis was to study contents and processes of identity development among people in their late twenties. The studies are based on identity status interviews and surveys performed with participants in the GoLD (Gothenburg Longitudinal study of Development), at ages 25 and 29. **Study I** investigated Swedish emerging adults' expectations regarding possible future parenthood through content analysis of identity status interviews with the 124 (58 women) participants who were not yet parents at age 25. Thematic analysis of the participants' interview narratives in the identity domains of parenthood and work/family priorities showed that most participants were sure they wanted to become parents, but often just not right now. First they wanted a stable financial situation, a romantic relationship, and time for self-focus. More women than men talked about parenthood as a social norm and wanted to prioritize both work and family equally. More men than women wanted to prioritize either work or family, most often family over work. The women gave more examples of how they intended to solve potential work/family conflicts. Study I thus indicated that many Swedish emerging adults postpone, but do not reject, parenthood. Moreover, the results indicate that in emerging adulthood more women than men consider these aspects of their identities. **Study II** concerned the process of identity development between ages 25 and 29 among the 124 (63 women) participants who took part in the study at both ages. The study had a special focus on how people continue to evolve their identities after making identity commitments. Each of the four identity statuses (identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion) was equally common at both ages. Stability in identity status was typical of individuals assigned to all statuses except moratorium. Further analysis of interview narratives from participants assigned to identity achievement or foreclosure at both interview occasions ( $n = 55$ ), showed that relevant processes of continued identity development after commitments have been made are: the ways in which people approach changing life conditions, the extent to which they continue to engage in meaning making, and how they continue to develop their personal life direction. Identity achievement was connected to a deepening of the identity narrative on all three dimensions, whereas developmental patterns connected to foreclosure were more diverse. Study II thus showed how identity development continues in the late twenties, also beyond identity achievement. Moreover, the study indicated that further evolvement might be a key process through which an established sense of identity can stay adaptive and flexible. **Study III** compared two models commonly used to study identity development, the identity status model and the dual-cycle model, among the 123 (62 women) participants who completed both measures at age 29. These models are based on the same theoretical framework and use the same terminology, though the associations found between them were only modest. Further, a validation of the Swedish version of the measure commonly used to study the dual-cycle model (Dimensions of Identity Development Scale; DIDS) could not confirm the processes in the model as a sufficient representation of the participants' ratings on the DIDS. The findings in this study call for a reconsideration of what the identity status terminology actually means, what the identity status interview and the DIDS actually measure, and how these models reflect people's identity development. In sum, this thesis shows some ways people may continue to evolve their identities as life unfolds. Further, the results suggests that to learn more about how people develop their identities we need to combine and evaluate different theoretical approaches and research methods, and keep an open mind regarding what people tell us about their experiences.

**Keywords:** identity development, identity processes, identity contents, emerging adulthood, young adulthood, longitudinal development, parenthood, work/family priorities

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